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SUBJECT Admiral Stansfield Turner: the Mideast

DAVID HARTMAN: A week ago President Reagan announced that he was sending American troops back to Beirut. The mission to enable the Lebanese government to reassert its authority following the massacre of hundreds of Palestinian civilians. But the force of Americans, French and Italians has not really yet been deployed, although some of them are on the ground in Lebanon, reportedly because Israel has not yet withdrawn its troops from East and West Beirut or from the airport, the international airport in Beirut.

Well, joining us this morning from Washington to discuss the Mideast, Admiral Stansfield Turner. He was the head of the CIA under the Carter Administration.

How concerned are you that every time there is violence in Lebanon, American and other national troops are going to have to go in to keep the lid on?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Well, it is a concern because each time it becomes more risky. The last time we went in we had a specific task to do, to get the PLO out of Beirut in accordance with the evacuation plan. Clearly, there was a termination date for that. This time we're in for a much less defined task, of trying to help the Lebanese government establish control over West Beirut.

HARTMAN: Excuse me, Admiral. You're a military man. You're also now an intelligence pro. How wise is this move, in your judgment, to send our troops back in there? Or is there an alternative?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I don't think there was any alternative

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here because the guaranty that we gave of peace in West Beirut after the PLO withdrew their fighting forces was broken by the Israeli move into West Beirut. Our mistake was not objecting very strenuously as soon as the Israelis moved in.

HARTMAN: Admiral, how long, in your judgment, if at all, will it take before the Lebanese can really exert authority in Lebanon and do so in a peaceful manner, given the history of violence, bloodbaths, and so forth in that country?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, the odds aren't good that they're going to be able to do it quickly. There is one very favorable sign on the horizon this morning, David. The Muslims in West -- in Beirut, in general, are apparently not placing the blame for the recent massacre on the Christian Phalangist military people. They're placing it instead on the Israelis and on Major Haddad, a renegage Christian military man who works, really, for Israel.

Whether that's true or not makes little difference. The fact that the Muslims are trying not to place the blame on their principal Christian compatriots in Lebanon is very encouraging. Obviously, they seem to want to diminish the internal fraction, or friction within Lebanon. And that's good.

HARTMAN: Some 14,000 PLO fighters have been scattered around the Middle East, and we understand there are still a couple of thousand of them in Lebanon. How concerned are you that these members of the PLO will continue, either with direct military intervention against the Israelis or with terrorist attacks, they're going to keep the pot boiling in the Middle East?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I suspect there's less risk from the PLO and their remnant people in Beirut than it is from the numerous factions that exist inside Lebanon itself. And one of those might just decide it was to its particular unique advantage to cause trouble, and might take some sniping shots at our people. It's going to be a very ticklish situation.

HARTMAN: Based on your experience, Admiral, Syria is an important part of the equation, that country. They are still in Lebanon. But we understand King Hussein is concerned that Syrian troops could move down against King Hussein in Jordan. How big of a concern is that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: That is less of a concern to me at this time. We had that big problem in 1970. But I think that Hussein is much more stable in his country today. I think there's much more consciousness in the whole Arab community and in the world community that we can't let that kind of thing happen again. It's just too destabilizing.

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HARTMAN: Admiral, very briefly, and finally. How much more or less influence does the United States have now than we did when President Carter left the White House, in the Middle East?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think our reputation on the Arab side of the equation has definitely gone down. On the other hand, we have some movement here now. There is an opportunity if we can take a very strong stand behind President Reagan's plan for peace in the Middle East. We've got to look to the long run. Getting the situation in Beirut solved is just the first step. The real problem now is to tackle the issue of the Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza, so that we can get a long-term foundation for peace between Israel and the Arab world.

HARTMAN: Admiral Turner, thank you for joining us this morning.

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